

A GERMAN'S DESCRIPTION OF ITALY.¹

THE volume before us might not inappropriately be called an "Encyclopædia of Italy." It deals in the first eight chapters with the general geographical and geological features of the country, its shape, its surrounding seas, the relief of its principal mountain ranges, its geological construction, its climate, hydrography, fauna and flora. The next seven chapters deal generally with the Italian people and their life, the subject being classified under the various headings of population, history, products, commerce and trade, political institutions, religion, art, language and science. The sixteenth chapter, which is devoted to "Topography," extends over more than 120 pages; in it the various districts of Italy are taken in turn, and their principal towns, antiquities, rivers, and mountains are dealt with in some detail.

To write a treatise of this character is no easy task, if the book is to convey anything like an adequate account of the country. To test the completeness with which the author has accomplished his work we have consulted the book under various headings selected at random, and in few cases have we found any point of real importance or interest missing. The account given of the Italian lakes is very thorough, and contains details of their principal features, as well as information of a statistical character and several illustrations. Still greater interest attaches to the sections dealing with volcanic action and earthquakes, in which excellent illustrations are given of Vesuvius in its various aspects, the Solfatara, Etna, and the Lipari islands; and the references to the changes of relative level of the land and sea at the Temple of Serapis and the Blue Grotto may be cited. The chapter on "Plants and Animals" is not, perhaps, so fully treated as other parts of the book, and also there are a few slight inaccuracies, probably resulting from the difficulty of finding exact equivalents for the German words in the English translation. Whether the name "manna" is correctly applied to the sap of the Calabrian flowering ashes (p. 114) is a point on which we are not competent to pass judgment; it should, however, be mentioned that "manna of the desert" has been considered to be a lichen. When the fruit of the olive is described as green,

brown, or red (p. 116) the latter term hardly appears suitable. On p. 120 the name "gorse" is applied to *Genista hispanica*, a plant which, indeed, often takes the place of our English *Ulex* in Italy, but can hardly be properly called "gorse."

Again, it is doubtless probable, as stated on p. 122, that fishermen often apply the term "frutta di mare" to shell fish generally, but correctly speaking this is the name of the edible echinus. The large cuttlefish or octopus is too characteristic an article of food at Naples to be omitted from the list, and the Agoni and large trout of the Lombardy lakes ought to receive some mention.

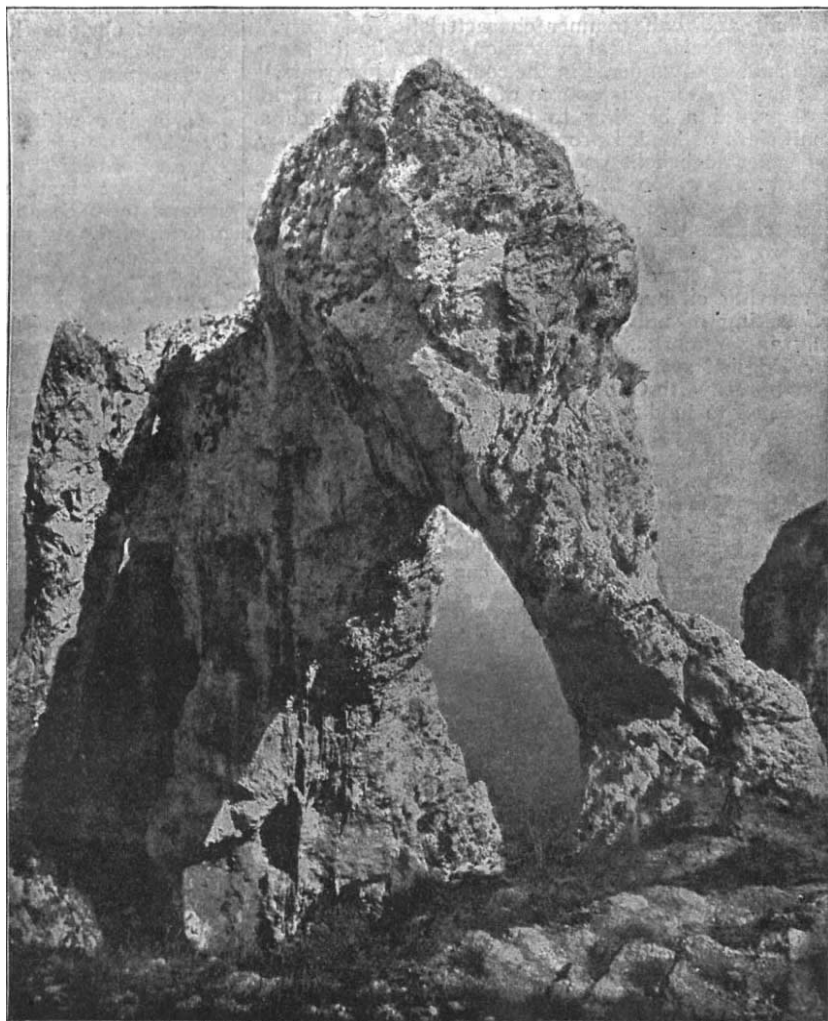


FIG. 1.—Arco naturale in Capri. From Prof. Deecke's "Italy."

We pass on to the chapter on "Political Institutions," where it is particularly interesting to see what a German thinks of the slipshod way things are done in a free country like Italy. Prof. Deecke strongly condemns the abuses resulting from political liberty and local government as practised in that country; for example, he says (p. 253):—

"The successful working of a liberal constitution and self government presupposes a conscientiousness and disinterestedness among the officials. There is little of these qualities to be seen in Italy. The honorary posts are looked upon as a kind of milch-

¹ "Italy, a Popular Account of the Country, its People, and its Institutions (including Malta and Sardinia)." By Prof. W. Deecke. Translated by H. A. Nesbitt, M.A. Pp. xii+485; illustrated. (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1904.)

cow which must be milked with all one's force when one is at the helm. In addition to this there is the want of scruple as regards public money, which, according to a very general view, exists in order to be appropriated to any plausible pretext or to be secured for one's family or friends. . . ."

The author also condemns the wasteful system which exists in municipal bodies of embarking on costly enterprises, which are discontinued after the next municipal election when another party comes into power. In this way the money of the ratepayers is squandered away with no return. In regard to the confiscation of the monasteries, the following sentences may be quoted :—

"These regulations, however, have been applied in the half and half manner characteristic of Italy." "The vast ecclesiastical possessions seized by the State were sold or squandered in the course of a few years." "Thus the enormous source of income which might have proved a blessing to thousands and created a small class of landed proprietors has failed to bestow the expected benefit on the country."

On p. 279 we are told, "The Building Societies are almost a public calamity." "The hideous new quarter near the railway station at Naples, on the Vomero at the same town, and in the Campus Martius at Rome are the best proofs of the results of carrying on business in this manner."

Speaking of universities, Prof. Deecke makes the following remarks, which are equally applicable to our English system :—"There is another difference as compared with Germany, namely, that the Professor appointed to hold a course of lectures is not allowed to take a general survey of his subject or to handle it fully, but has to dispose of a prescribed section of the subject in the three hours a week, so that at the final examination questions can be set within this narrow circle. The instruction given at the Universities naturally suffers, and still more the scientific training of the students, which can only be described as unsatisfactory."

The chapter on art, language and science contains a list of the principal learned academies of Italy.

In connection with music, the author remarks :—"The music of Wagner, poor in melody and difficult to understand, has not become naturalised in Italy."

As illustrating more fully the wide and varied range of the subjects treated, we may instance the statement that there are ten times as many murders in Italy as in Germany, the regulations limiting the number of barrel-organs in Naples, the number of pedlars, the method of smelting sulphur, the statistics of Italians abroad, observations of terrestrial magnetism, the superstition according to which cats' tails are docked, a portrait of Garibaldi and a plan of the harbour of Genoa, photographs of Roman cattle, and descriptions of Italian cheese.

The section on topography might be very well studied by anyone contemplating a tour in Italy. It gives an excellent account of the features worth noticing in different districts, and it includes the Maltese group as well. It is well illustrated. But for that matter the whole book would well repay reading before or after visiting Italy. The average tourist contents himself when visiting a new country with seeing the principal churches and picture galleries, usually conducted by a guide, but to visit a country properly a wider survey should be taken, and a book like the present consulted. To the writer this book brings back the most pleasant reminiscences of bygone travels in Italy; to the reader who has stayed at home it presents as graphic a picture as any book can present of everything that is Italian.

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DISEASE-PROOF POTATOES?

THE recently established National Potato Society has as one of its many objects the discovery of a "disease-proof" potato. Even if it only succeeds in throwing some light on the relative immunity of some varieties, and on the causes of that comparative exemption, it will do some good. Next to wheat, there is no crop more important in this country, and whilst wheat-growing seems to be getting more and more unprofitable, the culture of potatoes is extending so much that it is evident that the growers must find some good reason for the increased production. The enormous importations from Germany, Holland, and other countries should serve as a stimulus to our farmers, for it is obvious that, excepting in the comparative cheapness of labour, those countries possess no special advantages over our own in the matter of potato-growing.

In dealing with the question of the potato disease, by which we mean the rotting caused by the fungus *Phytophthora infestans*, there are two principal subjects of inquiry: first, the life-history of the fungus; second, the "constitution," if we may use so vague a term, of the potato plant.

Neither of these subjects can be thoroughly investigated by the average potato grower. All important as they are, they lie outside the range of his capabilities. It is to our research stations or to individual experimenters that we must look for guidance. Even now the life-history of the fungus is imperfectly known. We do not know *for certain* what becomes of it in the winter, nor why it suddenly bursts into activity under certain atmospheric conditions. We do not know for certain whether it can pass any portion of its life on some other plant under another guise. We do not know for certain if a resting spore is formed, and our knowledge of the mycelium during the winter is, for the most part, conjectural rather than real. Here, then, are subjects for inquiry at once of the deepest physiological importance and of the greatest practical value.

As to the so-called disease-resisting varieties, also, further information is wanted, and this the practical man might supply. A visitor to the recent display of potatoes at the Crystal Palace, seeing the innumerable varieties there exhibited, might well wonder whether they all "supplied a want," and it was consolatory to the casual observer to hear even experts acknowledge the impossibility in some cases of discriminating one variety from another by the tubers alone. Had it been possible to show the haulms, the foliage, and the flowers and fruits with the tubers, as was, in fact, done in one or two cases, some points of distinction might have been forthcoming.

But although there is often a close resemblance between the tubers of one variety and those of another, and although it frequently happens that tubers of quite different shapes may occur on the same plant, yet it does not appear, from our present knowledge, that this similarity on the one hand, or this diversity on the other, is associated with any structural change which shall indicate either immunity from disease or increased susceptibility to its attacks. In the case of potatoes, certain varieties, like Sutton's Discovery, are unusually robust, producing haulms almost woody in their character, and these are found to be less susceptible to disease than are others of softer, more juicy consistence, which are more easily penetrated by the fungus hyphæ. Differences of this character, dependent on increased vigour of growth, are recognised by the growers, but we are not aware that microscopists have as yet made any researches into the structure of the potato foliage with special reference to its immunity from, or susceptibility to, disease. It